

The Day of Atonement¹



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Leviticus 16; Deuteronomy 19:16–21; Leviticus 23:27–32; Matthew 18:23–35; Isaiah 6:1–6.

MEMORY VERSE: “LORD, who is a God like you? You forgive sin. You forgive your people when they do what is wrong. You don’t [do not] stay angry forever. Instead, you take delight in showing your faithful love to them. Once again you will show loving concern for us. You will completely wipe out the evil things we’ve [we have] done. You will throw all of our sins into the bottom of the sea” (Micah 7:18, 19, NlrV).

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, OR YOM KIPPUR, IS THE MOST HOLY OLD TESTAMENT SERVICE AS SHOWN IN LEVITICUS 16. Leviticus 16 is carefully put in the heart of Leviticus. Leviticus itself is at the center of the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). This is to show how holy the Day of Atonement is. It also is spoken of as the Sabbath of Sabbaths (Leviticus 16:31). The day requires that all work be stopped. This fact makes it a very special Israelite yearly festival. It is time to rest and think about what God, as Creator and Savior, has done (and will do) for us.

This week we will study what happened on the Day of Atonement in the earthly sanctuary.² We especially will study the services with the two goats. This will help us to better understand deeper truths about salvation and how sin is finally removed.

1. Day of Atonement—an event that took place once a year when the earthly sanctuary (the house of God on earth) was cleansed by the high priest. Day of Atonement services symbolized (stood for) cleansing from sin and a renewed relationship with God.

2. earthly sanctuary—the home of God on earth in early Bible times. Here, the high priest offered prayers and the blood of animals to God for the sins of the people of Israel.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 3**THE YEARLY CLEANSING
(Leviticus 16:16, 30)**

Read Leviticus 16:16, 30. What is cleansed on the Day of Atonement?

Throughout the year all kinds of sins were transferred (moved) to the sanctuary. With the Day of Atonement comes the time for their removal. There are three parts to the Day of Atonement that are each important.

1. *The purification (cleansing) offering for the priest.* The high priest killed a bull for his sins. This made sure that he (the priest) would be clean when entering the sanctuary and doing the service to cleanse it.

2. *The purification offering of the goat “for the LORD”* (Leviticus 16:8, NKJV). During the year, the purification offerings “brought” all the sins of the Israelites into the sanctuary. The Day of Atonement was the time to remove these sins from the sanctuary. This process was done through the blood of the goat “for the LORD.”

3. *The elimination (removal) ritual (service) with the live goat for Azazel.* God wanted to get the sins of His people away from the sanctuary and the camp. So, another live goat was sent out into the desert.

Read Leviticus 16:15. What happened to this goat, and what did it symbolize (stand for)?

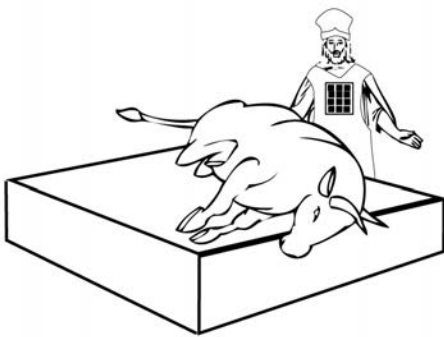


The live goat was sent out into the desert.

There was no confession of sin or laying on of hands involved with the goat for the Lord. For this reason, its blood was not a carrier of sin. So, it did not pollute. Instead, it cleansed. The result is clearly described in verses 16 and 20. The high priest made atonement (cleansing) with the blood of the Lord’s goat. It cleansed the entire sanctuary. The same method also resulted in making the people pure. This means that when the sanctuary was cleansed from all the people’s sins, the people themselves were cleansed too. In this way, the Day of Atonement was very special.

The Day of Atonement was the second step of a two-part atonement. In the first phase, during the year, the Israelites were forgiven. Their sins were not removed but were entrusted to God Himself. God was the One who promised to deal with them. The second part did not deal much with forgiveness. This is because the

people were already forgiven. In fact, the verb “forgive” is not in Leviticus 16 or in Leviticus 23:27–32. What this shows us is that the entire plan of salvation deals with more than just the forgiveness of our sins. This point makes even more sense when we look at the wider picture of the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan).



The high priest killed a bull for his sins.

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 4

BEYOND FORGIVENESS (Leviticus 16:32–34)

Read Leviticus 16:32–34. What was the important job of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement?

The important job of the high priest was to make peace between God and humans. In the sanctuary, the high priest managed the system and made sacrifices and offerings (Hebrews 8:3). His responsibility on the Day of Atonement was great. He did almost every service, except for

leading the goat for Azazel into the wilderness. But he did give the command to send the goat away.

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest became a living example of Christ. In the sanctuary the attention of God’s people was focused on the high priest. In the same way, Jesus is the important center of our attention. The work of the high priest on earth brought cleansing to the people. Jesus’ work in the heavenly sanctuary³ does the same for us (Romans 8:34; 1 John 1:9). The only hope of the people on the Day of Atonement was in the high priest. In the same way, our only hope is in Christ.

“The blood of Christ was to free the sorrowful sinner from the curse of the law. But it was not to cancel the sin. It would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement [cleansing]. In the same way, the blood of the sin offering removed the sin from the sorrowful sinner. But it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs [Leaders and Forefathers] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 357.

According to Leviticus 16:16–20, the high priest had to enter the Most Holy Place and cleanse it from sins. He then transferred (moved) all the sins of Israel onto the live goat and sent the sins away, through the goat, into the desert. So, all the sins of Israel were gone. This fulfilled (completed) the special goal of the Day of Atonement. The goal was a special

3. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

cleansing that was more than just forgiveness. There was no new forgiveness necessary on this day. God had already forgiven Israel's sins.

We struggle with all our God-given strength to put away all sin. But how can we learn to depend totally on Christ as our only hope of salvation?



The high priest transferred the sin of Israel to the live goat and then sent the goat into the desert.

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 5

AZAZEL⁴ (Leviticus 16:20–22)

Read Leviticus 16:20–22. What happened to the live goat?

The service with the live goat was not an offering. The lot (“vote”) decided which of the two goats was to be for Yahweh (God) and which one was for Azazel (often called the “scape-

goat”). The goat for Yahweh (God) was chosen as a purification offering (verses 9, 15). But the goat for Azazel was called the “live goat.” It was never killed. This is because the goat was never thought of as a sacrifice. The live goat came into the picture only after the high priest had finished his work in making the atonement of the entire sanctuary (verse 20). *This point is repeated: the service with the live goat had nothing to do with the real cleansing of the sanctuary or of the people. They already had been cleansed.*

Who or what is Azazel? Early Jewish thinkers said that Azazel was the angelic sinner and the author of evil, the leader of evil angels. We know Azazel as a symbol of Lucifer (Satan) himself.

So, the service with the live goat was to close the service that brought about the final removal of sin. Sin would be brought upon Satan, who was responsible for it in the first place, and then carried away from the people forever. “Atonement” was made upon it (Leviticus 16:10). In the same way, the goat carried the full responsibility for sin away from the sanctuary.

Does Satan play a role in our salvation, as some say we teach? No. Satan never carries sin for us as a substitute. Jesus alone has done that. Satan has no part in our salvation.

4. Azazel (or the scapegoat)—one of the two goats chosen for the Day of Atonement service. The other one was called the Lord's goat, which was killed as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Then the sins of the people were transferred (moved) by the laying on of hands upon the scapegoat, which was later moved from the sanctuary to the wilderness. This symbolized (stood for) the removal of sins from the sanctuary.

The service with the live goat is similar to the law of the false witness (Deuteronomy 19:16–21). The accuser (the person who brings up charges) and the one being accused (defendant) stand before the Lord. The Lord is represented by the priests and judges. Then an investigation is held. And if the accuser is found to be a false witness, he shall receive the punishment that the false witness wanted to be given to those who are actually innocent. (For example, remember the evil-minded Haman⁵ who put up the gallows [the frame for hanging] for loyal Mordecai.)

Thank God again for His merciful forgiveness and the fact that He will remember our sin no more (Jeremiah 31:34). How can we learn not to remember our sins once they are forgiven? Why is it so important for us to do this?



There were two goats: one for the Lord and one for Azazel, a symbol of Satan.

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 6

ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (Leviticus 16:29–31)

“So in the service of the sanctuary the people were taught each day the great truths about Christ’s death and work as High Priest in heaven. Once each year the people’s minds were carried forward to the closing events of the great controversy [war] between Christ and Satan. This would be the final removal of sin and sinners from the universe.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 358.

Read Leviticus 16:29–31 and Leviticus 23:27–32. What did God expect the Israelites to do on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement)? How are we to follow these principles (important rules) today, as we live in what has been called the antitypical (symbolic; standing for something else) Day of Atonement?

If someone in Israel in Bible times did not follow these instructions (rules), he or she was to be cut off and destroyed (Leviticus 23:29, 30). Therefore, the Day of Atonement was truly about life and death. It required the believer’s complete loyalty to God.

Suppose that someone confessed his or her sins during the first part of atonement during the year. This

5. Haman—Read the story about Haman and Mordecai in the book of Esther, chapters 3 to 7.

means that he or she confessed during the time of the daily sacrifices. But he or she did not take the Day of Atonement seriously. By rebelling (fighting) against what God had planned to show on this day, such a person would prove himself or herself to be not loyal to God.

What this means is that a person who claims faith in God can still lose salvation. As Seventh-day Adventists, we do not believe in once-saved-always-saved because the Bible does not teach it. We are safe in Christ just as long as we live in faith. We also surrender to Him and claim His power for victory when tempted and His forgiveness when we fall.

Read Matthew 18:23–35. What lesson should we learn from this powerful parable (story of truth)?

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 7

ISAIAH'S PERSONAL YOM KIPPUR (DAY OF ATONEMENT) (Isaiah 6:1–6)

In Isaiah 6:1–6, Isaiah sees the heavenly King sitting on a throne in the temple. The vision is a judgment scene that shows God as coming for judgment (Isaiah 5:16). Isaiah sees the true King, who is Jesus Christ, according to John (John 12:41).

Isaiah was God's prophet, and he called others to repentance (the act of turning away from sin). But Isaiah also understood that in God's presence he was doomed. Faced with God's holiness and glory, Isaiah saw his own sinfulness and also the uncleanness

of his people. Holiness and sin do not work together. Like Isaiah, we all need to decide that we cannot pass through God's judgment on our own. Our only hope is to have a Substitute, who is Jesus Christ.

What occurs on the Day of Atonement that also appears in Isaiah 6:1–6?

The combination of a temple filled with smoke, an altar, judgment, and atonement for sin and uncleanness reminds us strongly of the Day of Atonement. Isaiah experienced his own "personal Day of Atonement."

Working like a priest, a seraph (a "burning" angel) took a burning coal from the altar to cleanse the prophet of his sin. This is a good example of the cleansing from sin that is possible through the sacrifice of Jesus as High Priest working for humans. Isaiah recognized this as a cleansing service. And he kept still as the coal touched his lips. So, his "iniquity [sin] is taken away" and his "sin is forgiven" (Isaiah 6:7, NASB). The verbs in verse 7 show that forgiveness is given by the One sitting on the throne. The Judge is also the Savior.

God's work of cleansing brings us from "Woe to me" (verse 5, NIV) to "Here am I. Send me" (verse 8, NIV). Understanding the heavenly sanctuary work on the Day of Atonement leads us to tell others about Christ since we know for sure we are saved. This is because we know that, in judgment, we have a Substitute, Jesus Christ. His perfect character (holy life symbol-

ized by the blood) will help us to stand without fear of being judged as guilty (Romans 8:1). When people are thankful, it encourages them to do God's work. And forgiven sinners are God's best ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:18–20). This is because they know what God has saved them from.

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 8

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The work in the Holy of Holies had been completed, and the sins of Israel had been removed from the sanctuary by the blood of the sin offering. Then the scapegoat was presented alive before the Lord. And in the presence of the group of Jewish people, the high priest confessed over the goat ‘all of the sins the people of Israel have committed [done]. . . . In that way he [the high priest] puts their sins on the goat’s head” ’ Leviticus 16:21, NIV. In the same way, the work of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary has been completed. Then, in the presence of God, heavenly angels, and the great number of the saved, the sins of God’s people will be placed upon Satan. Satan will be declared guilty of all the evil which he has caused people to do.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 657, 658.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Why would any understanding of

the plan of salvation not be complete if it leaves out the work of Christ as our High Priest? What does the sanctuary teach us about just how important the work of the High Priest in the sanctuary is to the plan of salvation? A good part of the New Testament book of Hebrews is dedicated to (set aside for) the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. In view of this, just how important is that work?

② Someone wrote about the work of Christ, from His death to His ministry (work) in the heavenly sanctuary. He said that Christ’s work is part of “God’s step-by-step method” of dealing with the sin problem. His work is to help us answer all questions about His justice, fairness, and love. Think deeply about that thought, especially in the great controversy theme. What does it teach us about the great problems caused by the foolish tragedy of sin?

③ In the past, some Seventh-day Adventists were taught about the Day of Atonement in a way that left them without any hope of salvation. Such a view comes from a false understanding of the purpose of the Day of Atonement. Think about the word *atonement*. What does it mean? How is atonement received? Who does the work of atonement? How is it done? How should these answers help us to understand why the Day of Atonement is really good news?